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The Ecumenical Patriarch spoke at the Interfaith meeting “Bahrain Dialogue Forum”



In the capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain, during the Interfaith Meeting, which is organised by the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in collaboration with the Muslim Council of Elders, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew spoke on Thursday, November 3.

The Patriarch emphasised in his speech that the deliberate distortion of the other pushes everyone to interfaith dialogue. It is not possible to eliminate the fear of the other and the exclusion, but only through constructive dialogue and effective meetings characterised by a spirit of complementarity, trust and respect.

In the framework of the Meeting in Bahrain, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew met with Patriarch John X of Antioch.

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His All-Holiness' speech follows below:

Distinguished Guests,

Honored Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

It is an honor to be invited to address this crucial conference, the “Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence,” which seeks to underline the importance of interfaith dialogue and understanding among different cultures and diverse civilizations, in the wake of the Abu Dhabi meeting in 2019. We wholeheartedly congratulate the organizers for having the courage and vision to

pursue this essential initiative in promotion of this blessed mission.

Orthodox Christianity has a long experience of cohabitation with other religions and denominations. However, this experience has not always proved peaceful or uncomplicated, especially when molded by the rise of nationalism in the second half of the 19th century, the clash of global geopolitical forces throughout the 20th century, and the rise of religious fundamentalism in the early 21st century. A series of historical events redefined the worldwide religious landscape, shaping the relationship of Orthodoxy to a pluralism of religions and reassessing its role on the global scene. In this context, the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, convened on the island of Crete (June 2016) assume great significance: “Honest interfaith dialogue contributes to the development of mutual trust and to the promotion of peace and reconciliation. The Church strives to make ‘peace from on high’ more tangibly felt on earth. True peace is not achieved by force of arms, but only through love that ‘does not seek its own’ (1 Cor 13:5). The oil of faith must be used to soothe and heal the wounds of others, not to rekindle new fires of hatred.” (Encyclical, par.17)

In this sense, encounter and dialogue require commitment and determination at both the individual and the community level. All dialogue is personal, since it involves the interaction of unique, irreplaceable persons, whose personhood is intimately connected to their unparalleled social, cultural and religious particularities. Opposition to ecumenical or interreligious dialogue usually comes from fear and ignorance or intolerance of religious diversity. By contrast, authentic and sincere interreligious dialogue recognizes the differences among religious traditions and promotes peaceful coexistence and cooperation among peoples and cultures. This does not mean denying one’s own faith, but rather adapting and enriching one’s own identity and self-consciousness in the perspective of openness to others. It can also heal and dispel prejudice and contribute to mutual comprehension and peaceful conflict resolution.

Bias and prejudice are rooted in misrepresentation of the other – which is precisely why dialogue is essential, because it can dispel mistrust and suspicion; encounter and dialogue are only effective if undertaken in a spirit of inclusion, trust, and respect. Through dialogue, we confirm that all of us share the same world. Through dialogue, we define our readiness to embrace difference. This spirit is concisely captured by a recent document approved by our Ecumenical Patriarchate and entitled *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (2020). There, in paragraph 55, we read: “Knowing that God reveals himself in countless ways and with boundless inventiveness, the Church enters into

dialogue with other faiths prepared to be amazed and delighted by the variety and beauty of God's generous manifestations of divine goodness, grace, and wisdom among all peoples."

This is the spiritual wealth of what we call the "dialogue of life." For Orthodox Christians, interreligious encounters and every-day co-existence with people from different faith traditions are and will continue to be an important means through which to experience the intrinsic value of cultural pluralism.

Esteemed participants, beloved sisters and brothers,

The Ecumenical Patriarchate intends to lead by example, demonstrating how religious leaders should sustain and advance peaceful coexistence, justice and equity. Orthodox Christianity has found in common humanitarian efforts a genuine expression of the power of faith to promote co-existence, to overcome crisis, and to support an ethic of inclusiveness, an ethos of solidarity. We have been for decades at the forefront of organizing and supporting interreligious conferences, aware that sincere dialogue can confront intolerance and violence, while preventing the abuse of religion by fundamentalists and fanatics.

As ministers of faith, we need at all times to build bridges. For over thirty years of our tenure as Ecumenical Patriarch, these are the principles we value not only for our own Church and Christianity in general, but for all religions and humanity at large.

Thank you for your presence here and your kind attention!

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